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TAGS: PHUM PGOV KPAO ZI ZANU PF

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND ZANU-PF INSIDER SIMBA MAKONI
DISCUSS COMING TRANSITION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND ZIMBABWE'S
FUTURE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CHRISTOPHER DELL, REASONS 1.4 (b) (d)

Summary

1. (C) In a December 20 meeting with the Ambassador, ZANU-PF Politburo member and former Finance Minister Simba Makoni said ZANU-PF had finally acknowledged economic problems but would not be able to change its disastrous economic policies without a change in leadership. The earliest that could come would be 2008, but 2010 was a better bet when both presidential and parliamentary elections could be held. In the interval, the economy would continue its freefall. Makoni acknowledged that many in the ZANU-PF leadership were looking past Mugabe and planning and preparing for the post-Mugabe future. The Ambassador noted that international reengagement was the only hope of reviving Zimbabwe's economy and that potential successors would be held accountable for their actions and others would be well advised to begin reaching out to the West now. End Summary.

Economic Problems Take Center Stage) Even Within ZANU-PF

2. (C) Makoni said he had been out of the country and had not attended last week's ZANU-PF party conference but agreed with the Ambassador that economics had played a greater role than in the past. (N.B. ZANU-PF has conferences each year and congresses, where leadership questions are settled, every five years.) Still, Makoni's impression of the conference was that little had happened beyond the conferences most public moments, most of which, such as the ballyhooed declaration that Zimbabwe should accept no further UN envoys without proper vetting, were empty rhetoric. However, there had been one change of significance, President Mugabe's admission that the country had economic problems, a term he had avoided in the past.

3. (C) In fact, Makoni said Mugabe had identified eight problems, all connected with the agricultural sector, and had blamed the government for these problems, conveniently ignoring the fact that he was the head of the government. However, the President had identified no solutions. In fact, Makoni said the ruling party was bereft of solutions. It was not that the GOZ did not know what to do. There were still many bright and capable people in the country and in the government. The problem was that nothing could be done as long as President Mugabe remained in power.

4. (C) In the meantime, the economy would continue to deteriorate with inflation likely to hit 700 percent according to official figures by year's end and a 1200 percent by more reliable private assessments. Moreover, the harvest was likely to be a disaster again next year, and Makoni speculated that Mugabe was preparing the public for the bad news by acknowledging problems now. The Ambassador asked how much longer this could go on before the resources the state used to sustain itself dried up. Makoni acknowledged that the ruling party's patronage system was becoming ever more concentrated but contended that as long as any meaningful economic activity was on-going, the regime would find a way to milk it.

Prospects For Change) 2008 At The Earliest

5. (C) Makoni said he could think of only three ways that the regime would change. The first was a mass uprising. He discounted this possibility, not because the people weren't angry, but because they were focused on trying to survive. The second was a military coup. This also seemed unlikely given the loyalty of then senior commanders. However, disaffected middle-ranking officers had launched many successful coups, and there were certainly plenty of those as

pay increases had failed to keep up with inflation and perks had been cut. The third possibility was a change of leadership. This would happen inevitably. However, the longer it took the more the country,s infrastructure would deteriorate and the more of the country,s elite would leave for South Africa and elsewhere in search of a better life.

16. (C) Makoni initially said that in his view a change in leadership would not occur before 2008 at the earliest and more likely 2010. The next presidential election was scheduled for 2008 and the next parliamentary election for 2010. The debate within the party, to this point informal, was whether to harmonize the two by bringing forward the parliamentary election or by delaying the presidential elections. Makoni conceded that Mugabe would ultimately make the decision and predicted it was more likely to be 2010, allowing Mugabe more time in office to cement his legacy as not only the country,s founder but also it,s savior from recolonization after 2000. The Ambassador noted in that regard an internal contradiction in Mugabe,s thinking) the longer he stayed in office the longer he delayed real reform and ensured that his legacy would be the destruction of the country,s once thriving economy.

Accountability and Would-Be Successors

17. (C) Makoni agreed with the Ambassador that Mugabe was increasingly irrelevant and that many in party were already looking beyond him. Makoni said most of the party elite fell into that category. However, the party rank and file and those around the President preferred to defer thinking about the future until Mugabe was gone. That said, succession planning was going on in both the Mujuru and Mnangagwa camps as well as elsewhere, to which Mugabe was not a party.

18. (C) The Ambassador noted, and Makoni agreed, that whoever succeeded Mugabe would have only one place to turn for the balance of payments support needed to revive the Zimbabwean economy) the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and the traditional donors. Given that reality, the Ambassador suggested that it would be in their own interest as well as in the interest of Zimbabwe for would-be successors to begin reaching out to the West. Makoni acknowledged this would be wise but said most, if not all, senior GOZ officials, among whom he did not include himself, would be reticent about meeting Western ambassadors and other interlocutors for such a discussion, fearing how it would be interpreted within the party.

19. (C) That said, Makoni argued that there was a generic assumption in the party that Mugabe,s successor would not be as wedded to the past or to Mugabe,s ideology and rhetoric. The world would therefore be more welcoming and Zimbabwe less hostile and on that basis there could be reengagement. The Ambassador responded that this might be right but it was not a given that Mugabe,s successor would be someone acceptable to the West. Didymus Mutasa, for instance, would not be seen as credible reformer and there would even be doubts about Joyce Mujuru. It was important that the senior leaders in the government understood that the West would hold them accountable for their actions. It was equally important to find a way for quiet dialogue about the post-Mugabe system if a chaotic, possibly bloody, transition were to be avoided. Makoni agreed but lamented that most of ZANU's leaders were too fearful to engage in any such process.

110. (C) Makoni acknowledged that ZANU-PF would need to seek a leader who could both appeal to the Zimbabwean people and to the outside world. However, the right question was not who that person might be but how they would be chosen. Makoni said the party,s current process was murky and could lead to chaos. The Ambassador said this was almost certainly by design. Many authoritarian leaders preferred not to designate a clear successor in order to reinforce their control. Makoni conceded the point and lamented once more the likelihood of chaos should Mugabe die before designating a successor.

Comment

11. (C) Despite his disavowals, Makoni is an influential ZANU-PF insider whose star is likely to shine brighter as Mugabe,s dims. He is widely considered to part of the Mujuru faction,s senior leadership and in that guise could emerge in a senior position in a post-Mugabe government. He has even been mentioned as a potential successor to Mugabe himself. What Makoni brings to the table is credibility with the West, which no other current ZANU-PF leader can claim. He would likely be a pivotal figure in the party,s inevitable efforts to reengage the international community and the IFIs. He was therefore an ideal interlocutor through whom to pass to other ZANU-PF leaders the message that we

know they will eventually have to seek the West's support to begin digging out of the hole they have dug for themselves and that we will necessarily condition our reengagement on real political and economic reform.

DELL